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## Udi Butler, Irene Rizzini, Marcelo Princeswal, Roberta Abreu, Paula Caldeira, Alessandra Caldeira *Nos: the revolution of the day to day*

### Book section

#### Original citation:

Originally published in Butler, Udi Mandel, Rizzini, Irene, Princeswal, Marcelo, Silva de Abreu, Roberta, Caldeira, Paula, Caldeira, Alessandra and Rony, Gaelle (2007) *Nos: the revolution of the day to day*. [CIESPI/ PUC](#), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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Available in LSE Research Online: September 2014

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. The Revolution of the Day to Day .

. Dayana Conceição . Dayane Conceição .  
Eron Nicolau . Gabriela Torres . Leandro Paican  
. Manuelle Rosa . Quênia Lopes .

. Udi Butler . Irene Rizzini . Marcelo Princeswal .  
. Roberta Abreu (Eds.) .



# Nós

The Revolution of the Day to Day

DayanaConceição . GabrielaTorres . EronNicolau  
. QuêniaLopes . ManuelleRosa . LeandroPaiacan .  
DayaneConceição .

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CIESPI – International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood, In partnership with PUC-Rio.

CIESPI is a research and reference center dedicated to the development of research and social projects for children and youth and their links with family and community. The center has a goal of influencing policy and practice to this population, contributing to their wholesome development and promoting their rights.

*[www.ciespi.org.br](http://www.ciespi.org.br)*

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*Support*

Economic and Social Research Council (UK) through the Research Programme Non-Governmental and Public Action <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/NGPA/> Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago (USA) and Kellogg Foundation (USA)

Originally Published in 2007 as Nós: a revolução de cada dia. CIESPI / PUC-Rio : Rio de Janeiro. ISBN 978-85-60079-04-9



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# Introduction

## The Revolution of the Day to Day...<sup>i</sup>

*“There are two ways of rejecting the revolution. The first is to refuse to see it where it exists; the second is to see it where it manifestly does not occur. These are, in a nutshell, the reformist and the dogmatic pathways. Indeed, a revolution of great amplitude is developing today, but at the molecular or microscopic level”*  
(Guattari, 1996, p.8). *Soft Subversions*.

Where do we find the revolutions of today? Those revolutions that suddenly change society, the way in which things work, are organized, how people think. Guattari provokes us to think differently about such changes, guiding our gaze not only to the “great revolutions”, which are the more traditional forms of political organization and mobilization, but also to other places, where we can also find the political. This place is present, for instance, at a local level (in our communities, neighbourhood, schools); at an interpersonal level (how we relate with each other, with our family, with strangers, with those who are different); but also at a subjective level (how we feel, react, what we dream).

For this author, as for many others, power – which is the capacity to influence – is not restricted to institutions like the state, the political party, the union, nor to individuals like the president, the policeman or teacher. Power also circulates through society, like veins through a body, acting

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<sup>i</sup> A quick note about the translation of the title. The original Portuguese title chosen by the group *Nós: A revolução do dia a dia*, has been translated as *Nós: The revolution of the day to day*. ‘Nós’ means “us” but also “knot”, an ambiguity that was originally intended, creating an image of the tying together of threads and personal trajectories that is so characteristic of collective action. I have left this term in the English translation no other term seems to do justice to the originally intended meaning.

through the ways that we think, act and react, make sense of the world, relate to each other and even dream. The revolution, then, is not only related to taking over the political institutions of society, but also in a way much closer to our day to day, to the transformations in our ways of being and relating.

This molecular and microscopic level is clearly visible in the texts that we present here. Coming from diverse fields of action – like the Black Movement, Hip Hop Culture, community development, the Gay Movement, the Workers Movement – one of the many points in common between the trajectories gathered in this book is the sensitive way in which the authors describe their molecular and microscopic revolutions. These generate a transformative process at all levels of being, whether in the recognition or identification with one's ethnicity, sexuality and/or with one's community. What unites these processes of change is the desire to take responsibility and embark on a struggle for equal rights; for recognition; freedom of expression; for the transformation of that which is around us. We believe that the "great revolution" of which Guattari speaks is connected to the sum of many micro-revolutions, which in joining together create new practices.

Nowadays many people comment that the youth of today are not as politically engaged as that of past decades. It is said they are becoming ever more individualistic, consumerist, apathetic in relation to political questions and absent from collective projects seeking social transformation. However, as some demonstrate in this book, the restless spirit of youth before injustice and inequality is still alive. Though not necessarily representing the majority, groups of young people continue to mobilize in many ways and in diverse spaces with the goal of transforming the reality in which they live.

Currently the spaces of resistance and political expression have become ever more diverse. Spaces like the Internet offer new ways of communicating, debating and organizing political action. New spaces of debate like the World Social Forum allow for the convergence of many fields of action against a kind of globalisation that favours capitalist interests. Cultural forms like Hip Hop, theatre, cinema, offer new possibilities for "gathering people", of expressing and reflecting the world around us. The growing importance of themes like the protection of the environment also allow for the emergence of new sites of struggle, gathering young people (perhaps more than any other topic in the present) in the search for more balanced ways of living with nature. At the same time that new

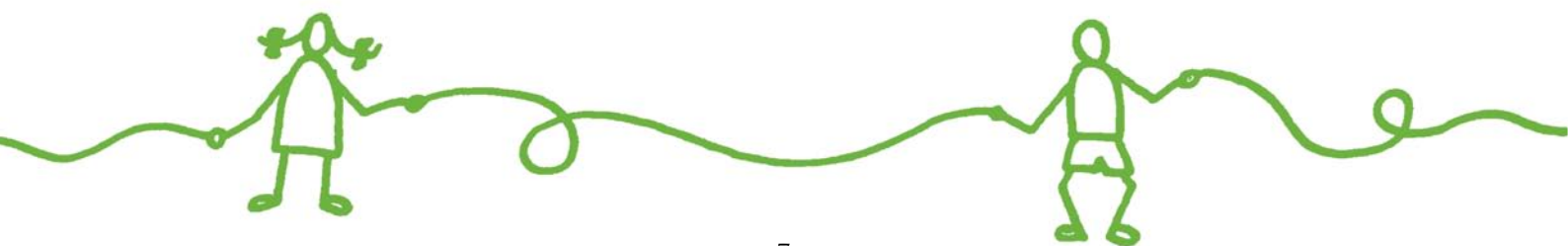
spaces of participation emerge, the challenges faced by young people are immense: unemployment, violence, not being listened to or understood by adults or other young people. These challenges can also be seen in the texts that follow.

For these young people and for the groups in which they participate, the question of social transformation is not restricted to the traditional political spaces and institutions, also being present in sites of struggle against power in its more diffuse nature. This kind of power is present in a culture of machismo, of homophobia, racism, elitism, and in the ways of thinking and feeling that they perpetuate. The reflections narrated here show how these oppressive cultures are present in the day to day, and how it is possible to confront them and effect change.

On the other hand, whereas we have observed new forms and spaces of youth participation, we cannot neglect that traditional forms of struggle are still present and have great importance. We point to, for example, the participation of young people in legislative assemblies, in unions, in political parties that are conservative as well as progressive, in student movements, amongst others. In this way we note the importance of student organization as a form of political mobilization, as in the case of the “Movimento Pinguin” in Chile, whose protests in 2006 provoked policy changes in the education sector. We can also note the growth of the youth vote in recent elections in Brazil: according to the Superior Electoral Tribunal (2006), there was a growth of 39.9% amongst 16 and 17 year olds who obtained their electoral register.<sup>ii</sup> It is important to point out then, that “traditional” and “innovative” forms of political engagement coexist in the public sphere, to a lesser or greater extent, according to the circumstances. They are not mutually exclusive processes and it is not rare to find young people who participate in, for instance, relatively recent movements as well as political parties.

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<sup>ii</sup> Voting in Brazil is compulsory from the age of 18 and voluntary from the age of 16.





The texts that make up this book are the result of a process of individual and collective creation of a group of seven young people coming from diverse segments of Carioca society, between the ages of 15 and 27 years old.<sup>iii</sup> The book presents the trajectories of these young people, focussing on their participation in different groups, movements and projects engaged in a struggle for citizenship and social justice.

The group started to meet in a systematic way in July 2006, through the combining of two projects development by the CIESPI team: *Cultures of Participation and Engaged Youth in the Americas*.<sup>iv</sup>

The project *Cultures of Participation* began in May 2005, with the objective of understanding how young people perceive and practice citizenship in the public sphere in the city of Rio de Janeiro. What do the concepts of citizenship, participation, protagonism and empowerment mean to them?

In the first part of this research, we identified 20 initiatives, social movements, projects and non-governmental organizations working with this sector of the population, focussing on the promotion of rights, citizenship and access to cultural opportunities.

These groups were chosen through debates amongst the research team, from suggestions from other CIESPI researchers and those of partner institutions, with the goal of obtaining a representative range of the diversity of initiatives in which young people participate.

From these visits and interviews with professionals and young people participating in these organizations, we began a second stage, in which we sought to deepen the stories of engagement and participation of a

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<sup>iii</sup> Cariocas are residents of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>iv</sup> We wish to thank our international partners: Economic and Social Research Council (UK); Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago (USA) and the Kellogg Foundation (USA), as well as the research partnership with the University of Illinois, Chicago, USA, coordinated by Maria de los Angeles Torres and with the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de México, coordinated by Norma del Rio Lugo. For more information see: [www.ciespi.org.br](http://www.ciespi.org.br)

The experiment in Chicago served as a base between the 3 universities above in the project *Engaged Youths in the Americas* – Chicago, Rio de Janeiro and Mexico City.

We emphasize that all the decisions in this publication – the texts and images, the graphic design, the cover, the title – as well as process of distribution are the result of the group. In this process we also counted with the help of Vicente Barros, Marcela Carvalho and Paula Caldeira.

diverse group of youths. Inspired by the study coordinated by Maria de los Angeles Torres (Chicago), the idea was to go beyond the interviews with the young people and initiate a collective process of narration and debate about their experiences. As they themselves well described, it was a process of reflection about “their lives inside activism and activism inside their lives”, in which the challenges, difficulties and pleasures of their chosen paths were touched on.

The book was composed collectively, including the collaboration, debates and reflections of all those involved, but it also reveals very intimate moments of individual creation, involving each one’s memories, thoughts and feelings. We hope that the book serves as an affirmation of the reality and the strength of the microscopic and molecular revolutions that, uniting, show that “another world” is really possible.

The team:

Udi Mandel Butler, Irene Rizzini, Marcelo Princeswal, Roberta Abreu,  
Paula Caldeira and Alessandra Caldeira.

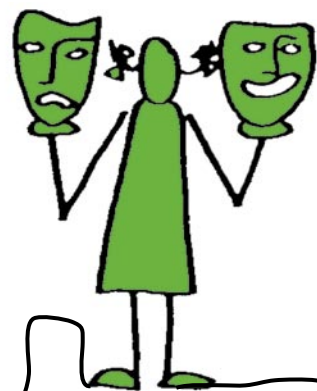
January 2007



Us:

# The Journey of Life

Dayana Conceição



## Dayana Conceição,

16 years old, born in the city of Rio de Janeiro and was raised in the district of Bangu in the community of Vila Aliança, where she lives.<sup>1</sup>

She is in her last year of secondary school in the Bangu State School.

At the end of 2000, she joined the group Caixa de Supresa [Box of Surprises], taking part in citizenship workshops that are integrated with dance and theatre.

Around 2002, she began working around citizenship issues with colleagues from the school Ollof Palme.

In 2003 she began voluntary work in theatre with Project Seeds of Tomorrow and in 2004, she entered the project Talent of the Moment, which started the Applause Company.

Still in 2004, she took on a role as coordinator of the State-wide Forum of Black Young Women, participating in a number of panels, debates and marches together with the Black Movement, Feminist Movement and the Grupo Arco-Íris.<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, she entered the project Youth for Gender Equality as a change-worker, acting as a facilitator and capacity builder with groups of young people from the communities of Nova and Vila Aliança.

All of these ways of participating are still present in Dayana's life.

She believes that social militancy or activism is a way of giving youth the opportunity of feeling useful to society, of growing as a person, being able to change his/her life-path a number of times.<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> The footnotes from here on are translators' notes to clarify the text. 'Community' in the context of Rio de Janeiro is way of talking about the urban shanty-towns or favelas. The term 'District' has been used for the Portuguese bairro, which refers to specific administrative regions of the city.

<sup>2</sup> In most cases, with a few exceptions, the translated names of the groups will be given rather than their Portuguese original. The Grupo Arco-Íris, the Rainbow Group, is a group for Homosexual awareness and rights.

<sup>3</sup> The original term often employed by the young authors here to describe their activities is militância, which can be translated as militancy, activism or social militancy, all of which will be used here. In Brazil the term militância has less military connotations than the English, militancy.

**H**i, how are you? My name is Marcos Paulo de Oliveira and I will tell you the story of an adolescent called Dayana Conceição, my friend. She is 16 years old, lives in Bangu, in the community of Vila Aliança and is in her final year at the Bangu State School.

This is a very interesting story of a young black woman who lives in a community, sees all the conflicts that exist there, but does not allow herself to be carried along. You will notice that Dayana is a youngster that is full of dreams and that although still young, has a fascinating life-story filled with highs and lows, and with many achievements. Ah! I almost forgot to tell you something you do not know. Over the next few chapters of this book, you will notice that there is a similar name appearing, with a similar story, though told differently. Have you already understood what I am saying? So I will explain: by the way I have been telling you may have already noticed that Dayana has a sister whose story is also in this book. But what you do not know is that Dayana is a twin. Twins? Yes, twins! A repeat trump-card, “double-trouble”, “smoke and sparks”...

This is how Dayana and Dayane are. Yes! God not happy with just making one little creature made two to confuse us. They are held up as real examples in their communities. Girls who are dreamers, responsible, direct...

**M<sup>e</sup>** in the highs and lows of life

I was always brought up by my mum, but as she worked I spent most of my time with my grandma. Sometimes I stayed with my brother, but he had to study, so I just went to my grandma's house.

Before my grandma looked after me many people watched over me. My grandma was always a key person in my life becoming a kind of base, not just for me, but for my whole family. Today we do not have her around anymore, she passed away, but with us stays the image of a warrior woman, who brought up her children and grandchildren and who was often the heroine of the family.

My mum always worked, I admire her greatly. She raised five children in the community without them getting involved in anything bad, giving these children what she thought was most important, education. I never lived with my dad and I don't even know why he never acknowledged me

as his daughter. Not being raised by him was never a problem for me, but sometimes there was a doubt and I asked myself: “why doesn’t a father acknowledge his child? Why not accompany the life of his child?” These were questions I asked myself and I ended up giving up without an answer. Not living with my dad did not bother me, my mum always fulfilled this role, always met my needs, never left me feeling at any moment without her affection or of anything that comes from a father. Though I never had contact with my dad, I have always been in touch with my sisters, his daughters.

After a long time living alone with my mum and my two siblings, my mum met my step-dad, Samuel. He came to live with us. I think that the “step-dad, step-child” relationships are not easy, but in my life having a step-dad was like a gift from God, because the moment he came into my life I knew that I did not have to give the presents for Father’s Day that I made in school to my mum. I do not know why God put him in my life, but if it was to make my family happy, He did it. My step-dad lived for nine years with us and over these nine years we built a beautiful bond that neither time nor death can erase. Today, he is no longer by my side, he passed away, God took him! Maybe it is because God also likes what is good. I do not accept it! But I know it was his time, he needed to go and I needed to stay and look after my mum who had some health problems and at that moment she would be like my daughter. I had to take care of her, and not feel down. But I carry in me the image of the friend, protector who God placed in my life. It is a shame he is no longer here!

I loved staying in my grandma’s house, the yard was big, there was a lot of room to play, there were animals that my grandma kept and it was really nice to live there. I loved playing with my cousins in the yard, we ran around. At the weekends when my mum was home I played with my friends by the house gate.

We played ‘little house’, tag, rounders, hop-scotch, hide-and-seek, catch... these games are the mark of the best years of my life. There, I felt happy, free, fearless! I believe that playing-time is sacred moment for a being and that if he does not live this moment he will not be capable of knowing or understanding his own history.

*Being a child is like this...*

*I will tell my story,  
a great journey of who has seen time pass.  
Good were the games that make me remember.  
But I miss them!  
A delicious longing for the good times, full of fantasies, great achievements and  
challenges that have brought me here...*

I have always been a lively child, restless, talkative, I never liked anything that made me stand still. Though I always liked playing with my friends, I also always enjoyed talking to adults, I think that is what made me be a “adult child”. At the same time that I was a child and behaved as one, I was an adult and mature.

My first school was the crèche Fabinho. My grandma put me there. In the first day of school I cried a lot, but after a few days I got used to it and cried no more. In my first school days it was my grandma who took me, after I got used to it my brother took me. Coming back from school was a lot of fun, me and my cousins came singing down the street. It was also my grandma who put me in my second school, Olof Palme. There I was part of the dance group in my class. It was the best school I have studied in. I have always been a good student, I was the first in my class to learn to read. I was a very participative student. After a while I became part of the student council of the school, representing the students of my school in meetings.

My classmates were the same all the time I studied there. We were more than just classmates, together we were a family and the teacher Sandra Fernandes was the mother of this family.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2000, I joined the group Caixa de Surpresa, which was close to my house. I was invited by my neighbour Claudia and her daughter Tatiane Santiago who was part of the group.

The group Caixa de Surpresa is made up only of girls and works with dance and theatre as ways of communicating,



*Performance of Talent of the Moment at Morro de Amores, 2004*

focussing on the theme of citizenship and prevention as the main objectives of its work. The group is coordinated by Waldemir Correa and Leidimar Alvez Machado. It was in Caixa that I discovered I liked theatre and that this was what I wanted. The two coordinators believed in my talent and in my life, but I would never have discovered my vocation if it was not for the group and the encouragement of those who have journeyed with me in this wonderful world of art, and who have become fundamental in my life. Today I cannot talk about my life without mentioning these people.

Caixa de Surpresa gave me many opportunities, amongst them that of going into Talent of the Moment, a project by the city council that works with dance, theatre, circus, art and music with young people from a number of communities throughout Rio de Janeiro. The project has formed the Applause Company, of which I am part. I also had the opportunity to be part of the soap opera Cobras e Lagartos, directed by Wolf Maia and Cininha de Paula.<sup>4</sup> On top of this I am part of the coordinating committee of the State-wide Forum of Black Young Women (created by the NGO, Center for the Documentation and Information, Women's Thing – which has a partnership with Caixa de Surpresa), where we discuss issues of race and ethnicity and promote state-wide meetings to broaden these debates.

Despite not liking politics, I know how important it is for our country. I know how important it is to see the world in a political way, and this political perspective that I have, I got through participating in projects.

I am also part of the project Seeds of Tomorrow that works with theatre, dance, schoolwork support, English and Spanish lessons, working with children and adolescents of the community. I am also part of Youth for Gender Equality Project, run by the PROMUNDO institute (an NGO that works with issues of gender, health and intra-family violence).

It is important that a youngster is part of projects, because they change the life of a young person towards having a political perspective about the things that happen around him, as it happened with me. It is really important that these projects make themselves felt in communities so that working together they can achieve good results. But it is also important

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<sup>4</sup>This soap opera was aired on Brazil's largest TV network, Globo, soap's being Brazilian TV's most popular products, attracting tens of millions of viewers.



that this occurs in a genuine way and that they are not just another project that works with youth.

You must be asking how I got here. Let me say right off that it was not easy. I have had all sorts of difficulties for being a youth, for being a black woman, for living in a community... but I had to overcome all these difficulties. After all, it was my dream that was at stake and I had to defend it. It was all that I had at that time and I had to conquer it, achieve it. It was my life goal and I was not going to let daily difficulties prevent me from fighting for it. And today I see how important it was not to give up on my dreams, because if I had done I would not be here in the Applause Company (a theatre, dance, circus and music company), coordinating the State-wide Forum of Black Young Women and having the role of change-worker in the Youth for Gender Equality Project, as well as in Caixa de Surpresa (acting, singing, drumming, etc.). I confess that I have not fulfilled all my dreams. Also, I am only 16 years old and still have a whole life to dream and to fulfil these. But what I have achieved already shows the importance of dreaming and believing in your dreams.

Living in a community requires caution, living here has its risks. Violence increases everyday and together with it youngsters and adolescents, vulnerable because of social neglect, become victims of drug abuse and also join drug trafficking gangs ending up closer to death. But there are also innocent people who die, coming to be confused with drug dealers, maybe for being poor, black, favela residents, or else becoming victims of stray bullets. Many times we are victims of those who are there to protect us, give us security, but who instead end up contributing to the increasing everyday violence in the communities.<sup>5</sup> The most revolting is to know that this society could not care less about these facts and through hypocrisy and ignorance hide the truth. That is revolting.

Today managing to raise a young person in a community without him getting involved in the drug trafficking gangs or anything else that takes him on the path of destruction is not easy. Many young people are dying in the communities, few are managing to finish high school.

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<sup>5</sup> This refers to the number of deaths caused by police officers in their fight against the drug gangs, but also to the involvement of some officers with the drugs trade itself.

It is very sad to know that many of these young people did not have the opportunity to play, run, that is, the opportunity to be children as I was, and the chance to change their life-path. It is sad to know that our young people are becoming lost. And do not even have the chance to live, to have a minimum of dignity. This saddens me! I know what life in the “favela” is like, I am from there and it is with great sadness that I tell of our reality, the reality of who loses a son, a friend a brother. Of who loses a day of school, of work, of who closes his shop, of who jumps off a swing, of who hides inside a bathroom, that is, of who cries because they can’t stand so much violence.

The community tells the story of a people who survive from their sweat and manage to achieve things at great cost, but who despite this do not give up living, do not give up on life and believe that one day all will change. And who still have time to smile. In truth, even if they don’t recognise it, we are a portrait of Brazil.

You must be wondering what I do to have fun. Well, truthfully, I have almost no time for leisure, but I confess that I have lots of fun in the rehearsals at the Company and in Caixa de Supresa. And I have my friends. As you can tell my life is a big rush, I am always busy.

I learnt a great lesson: despite the bloodiness of your battles, never give up on your dreams, on what you believe, on the opportunities at hand. Never let daily difficulties stop you from fulfilling yourself as a person, from being happy, from changing your life-path. From today on, go beyond prejudices, fears and believe in yourself, believe in what you are capable of doing.



*Performance of Caixa de Supresa in the “Gender and Ethnicity” Seminar, 2006*

*T*<sup>hey say</sup>

*They say that the world goes around  
but I always see it here  
They say I am a stranger  
but the stranger lives here  
They say I can go beyond  
but they keep me here  
They say I can dream  
but they don't let me sleep  
They say I have wings  
but I can't fly  
They say I am the future  
but they don't give me education  
They say I have an opportunity  
but deny me when I say my age  
They say I am free  
but deprive me with these bars  
They say I can scream  
but somebody wants to silence me  
They say I have talent  
but I live outdoors  
This way I can't stand it!  
They say I should respect someone  
but I do not know who this is  
They say they say everything  
But that is absurd!*

*Dayana Conceição*



# Once Upon a Time...



Gabriela Torres

## Gabriela Torres Barbosa,

27 years old, born in the city of Rio de Janeiro and raised in the district of Botafogo (Mangueira Community of Botafogo), where she lives.

She studies Social Communication specializing in Journalism at the Integrated University Hélio Alonso.

Since 2002 she has been part of the project Rede Brincar e Aprender [Learning and Playing Network], run by CIESPI, as a facilitator and story teller in the Community Library Padre Ítalo Coelho, in the community where she lives.

She also works as a reading facilitator with the project Planting the Future in the community Rio das Pedras, district of Jacarepaguá, since October 2006.

She effects change through education and believes that reading provides the initial kick. She invests in childhood and through it social change will come.



I was born in May 1979, in Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro. Before that I need to say that my mum dreamed about me and when I was born in that fresh Autumn October, I was exactly like she dreamed. Before I even cried, I sneezed and so it all began.

When you are born high up on the hill-shanty, your destiny is traced like an arrow that always marks that as your place. Despite this, you need to react and change. The people who have not been corrupted by poverty and violence, still manage to distinguish good from bad. I do not know how I managed, there is no recipe. My childhood, though poor, was very happy. There was no comfort, just the basics to survive. My parents separated when I was six years old, and my mum really struggled so that we would have our basic needs met. We never lacked food. I still remember how, for a long time, we were without TV. The bathroom and kitchen made out of wood remained throughout my childhood and invaded my adolescence.

My parents, though never interfering, had a great influence in my choices. It would be impossible not to be inspired by their political participation in the party and in the Neighbourhood Association.<sup>6</sup> I remember my mum taking me and my sister to the mobilization Direct Elections Now, in 1984.<sup>7</sup> We slept through the meetings that went on through the night and were enveloped by real dreams. Mummy's participation in the women's group of the Theatre of the Oppressed also influenced me a lot. The play that they did was part of our stories. The scene of the police-officer knocking down my door was a mixture of pain and release. It was during childhood that I learned to be just and to fight for justice.

Being born and growing up in a *favela* in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro made it easier for me to circulate through very different environments.<sup>8</sup> In the same State, city, district, I have witnessed realities that are very different from my own. Going into a middle-class building I realised that people did not greet each other in the elevator, some did not

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<sup>6</sup> Neighbourhood Associations in favelas, particularly in the 1970s and 80s when there was still a threat of their removal by the authorities, are important political spaces of decision-making and representation in these communities.

<sup>7</sup> Direct Elections Now [Diretas Já] was mass mobilization movement claiming the right to democratic elections and an end of the dictatorship in Brazil (which lasted from 1964-1985).

<sup>8</sup> The South Zone of the city is the wealthier more central region where the hill-side favelas live side by side with the middle-class neighbourhoods.

even know their neighbours. Were they to need help, it would be hard for them to find it next door.

Living in a *favela* “is full of joy”. When I arrive on the shanty-hill everyone knows me. People talk to each other, hug and kiss each other and really take care of each other. In the *favela* I feel safe and known, I have the freedom to be who I am without having to make up a character to please others. When you live in a community, this place becomes an extension of your house. It is like a tribe, the people treat each other like members of one family. Nobody starves because there will always be a open door and a gesture of solidarity.

I like living in the *favela* but I would like people who live there to have the opportunity to chose, to be able to walk around freely without people getting frightened in hearing the magic word “favela”.

It is there on the top of the hill-shanty that you live a harsh reality. The hard and sweet reality that you do not read about in the newspapers. Drug trafficking exists and the violence that appears on the news is not a lie. However we know that the news is manipulated to increase ratings. All this violence is perpetuated by the same people who denounce it on TV, because most people who use drugs are from the social classes A and B. The drug dealer has never left the hill-shanty and the weapons never stop arriving in ever increasing numbers. No one goes up the hill-shanty to document the fashion parades, Forró, Capoeira, Folia de reis, that is, all the cultural life of our people which is very beautiful and intense.<sup>9</sup>

I have never left my dreams behind. I have always known that the poor do not go to university, as the rich and powerful take upon themselves to tell me. But I also know that I wanted to do it and that they could not stop me. Poor people cannot let others direct their lives, we have to fight from the time we are born right to our last breath. If there is one thing we learn from an early age in the community it is to improvise.

I have been uneasy about having access to this mediocre and insane world of the middle-class. I feel guilty when I go to university and I meet, everyday in the same bit of pavement, the same woman and her child with her thousands of ghosts. I carry on walking each time

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<sup>9</sup> All these relate to regional dances from all over Brazil and which, through migration, are found in the favelas.

seeing more things that make me mad and once again I feel guilty for participating in this surreal world. I go home making the journey in reverse, I return to the real world that now seems less harsh after seeing all this.

I also need to remember that I have friends who have not let themselves become alienated even having been born in this petty world of illusions. This can only be positive, these are people that are aware of the world in which they live.

I would like to be clear that I am not lamenting my condition, I only want to show the current situation of those living in the *favela*. I know that I am privileged, fortunate whereas so many do not have anything. How many women in the favela manage to get to 27 years without having children? How many people manage to go into further education? How many have access to another language? How many go to the cinema? How many have been to the theatre? How many go to museums? How many have published their thoughts? How many are working? How many do what they enjoy? How many can read? How many?

I have participated since I was a child in social projects in my community and in adolescence I realised I was truly entangled by these kinds of initiatives. I started getting interested in education because I always thought that this would be the way for change. Education was inside me but I still had not altogether realised or accepted this. I tried to escape working in other areas and then finally decided that this was my mission. Being an art-educator, story-teller, library facilitator, auntie or any of these functions makes me feel honoured. I have a very fond regard for any and all activities connected to education and especially of children. Children teach me something everyday. Truth, honesty, loyalty, simplicity, all these are in the child.

When I go up the shanty-hill and see all the social sub-classes that are found there, I offer only my voice, my care and attention. I bring from the Community Library a basket of books to the crèche where the children who live in the harshness of the real world, wait for me anxiously. They listen to the stories and open the books that they already know, but which they are not tired of seeing. And each time they rediscover the books their



*Luiz Freire Center, Pernambuco State*



little eyes shine as if it was all new again. I go down once again, powerless, leaving behind the real world with the feeling that I could have done more and better.

My direct participation in projects and NGOs has been going on for more than nine years. I have participated in many projects focussing on children, on people living on the streets, on families and in a community photo-journalism project.

I go against the statistics and want to go against them more and more, but I do not want to do that alone. I want everyone to be able to come with me. I know it is very utopian believing that everyone will be able to do so many things that before were unthinkable. But if I cannot dream a little I will not have the strength to carry on. My weapon is my brain. Building my ideals, I transform my revolt into poetry and very soon will be able to use communication and journalism in the service of the excluded. With pencil and paper in hand and many ideas in my head, I will carry on insisting on the struggle. Always after a new reality for those who have not lost hope.

The clarity of my ideals is so great that I get scared. Being so aware brings me many problems, because the world is ugly at the moment and sometimes it is hard to take it. I am sure that I am on the path and hope to accomplish my mission in this crazy and neglecting world. I believe that investing in education is important and the fruits of this slow and almost invisible work in our society will be the solution for change in our highly unequal country.

I believe in love and this is what makes me carry on. I believe in life, in renewal. It is these things that make me believe in a real better world, with more justice, solidarity, decency, and that is more natural and alive.



*“When the bullet leaves the gun it is news.  
 Who lives there at the top knows something more, that the Pagode starts at twenty two  
 o’clock and the Forró has already begun, Capoeira is in the Samba Yard  
 and that the child has already played it.  
 The news did not even remember to show the other side of the favela.  
 Hei, you! Yes you, reader! Do not confine yourself to these news,  
 there is a lot more to say, go up the shanty-hill to know the real favela.”*



*Party at the Community Library Padre Ítalo Coelho*

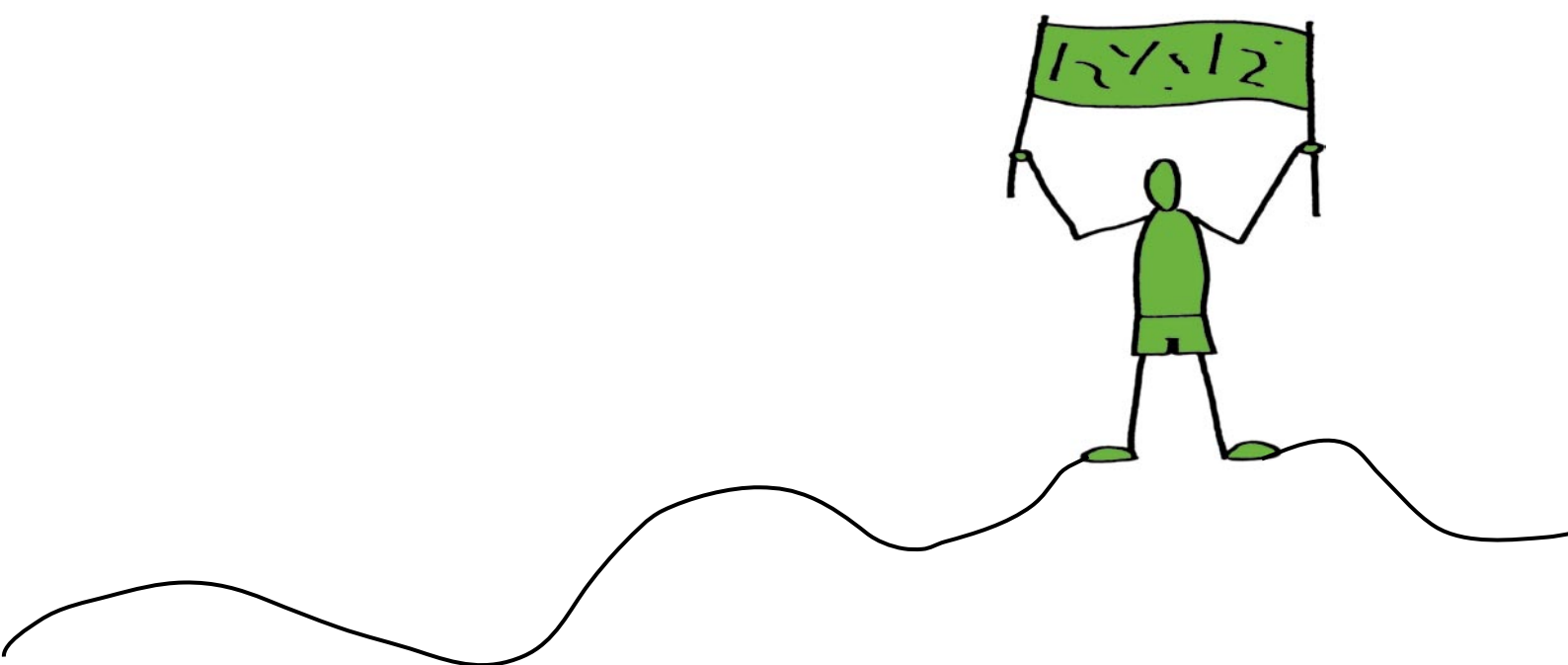
## *L<sup>ife</sup>*

*To live is to allow changes,  
 It is to be vulnerable at every moment,  
 It is to move without fitting  
 Fitting where there is no dwelling,  
 Living is all and nothing.  
 An empty house.  
 Empty and full,  
 Nothing... nothing...  
 Living inhibits absence,  
 An absence from ourselves.  
 The choice is to self-annul,  
 A suicide of thinking.  
 The death of thought.  
 A constant absent structure,  
 Unstructured present.  
 All and nothing at the same time.  
 Time for thinking*

*Gabriela Torres Barbosa*

# On the Struggle for Change

Eron Nicolau



## Eronides Oliveira Nicolau,

Better known as Eron, is 24 years old, born on the 3rd October 1982 in the city of Campina Grande, State of Paraíba. He is on the fifth year of secondary school in the State Technical School Visconde de Mauá, in the district of Marechal Hermes, where he is studying Electric engineering.

He is active in the area of worker rights in the non-governmental organization The Association of Adolescent and Youth Workers of the State of Rio de Janeiro (AAJT/RJ)



For him being an activist is not to be silent before problems but to fight for your ideal. He believes that often the activist thinks more about the difficulties of others than his own. He usually works from Monday to Monday, without a day off or holidays, because he believes in a better future.

My name is Eronides Oliveira Nicolau or simply Eron. I am 24 years old, I came from the city of Campina Grande as a child, running from a father who hit my mother, to live in Rio de Janeiro in the Community of Morro do Adeus with my stepfather. At first I was always a rebellious boy who always found a way to skip class to go to the beach with my schoolmates. I never liked violence but when someone steps really hard on your toes then I get irate. As time went on the relationship between my mum and stepfather became strained, because there were many expenses and he started throwing it all in my face. So my attitude changed and I started looking for a job. First I did not find anything, because they always ask for experience and I did not have any. At the end of 2001 there came an opportunity to do a course in Apprenticeship in Dental Prosthetics, offered by the organization Childhope Brazil. At the start of 2002 me and a couple of friends went to present the results of our work in the Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo. The ex-first lady was there, Mrs Ruth Cardoso, wife of the ex-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who asked me to make a model for her office desk. On top of this, I was asked to give a number of interviews to the local news and to a national TV news reporter.

On the way back to Rio we wanted to create a coop, but it was not possible, my friends lost hope and decided to find other means of subsistence. I was also going to look if I had not found another opportunity. At this time I had a number of friends who had invited me to work in drug dealing. I preferred to fight on a bit more, because I did not want to see my mum suffer, seeing as though she has suffered so much already and faced so many people and things so that I could have the opportunities that she never had. Around September or October 2002, I was invited to re-activate the Association of Adolescent and Youth Workers of the State of Rio de Janeiro (AAJT/RJ), a non-profit non-governmental organization made up OF and FOR adolescents and youths between the ages of 16 and 25. The Association was created on the 28th of March 1999 with the incentive of the great sociologist and ex-intern of the old



FUNABEM Jorge Barros, who passed away in July 2005, leaving behind wonderful fruits wherever he went and serving as an example in many struggles against disrespect towards Human Rights.<sup>10</sup> The Association also counted with the support of Dr Angélica Abrantes, Financial Labour Auditor of Region 1, who gave us a number of texts and workshops about the basics of working rights for children, adolescents and young people.

The AAJT/RJ is against child labour, as we know that the place of children is in school also having leisure and cultural activities. We also try to guarantee the working rights of adolescents and youths, for as we see in the country more and more children and adolescent are getting involved in crime and prostitution. Many of these do not even make it to their 25th birthday and those who do are arrested and do not learn a profession to be able to enter the formal labour market. That is, many are not re-integrated in society, as there is much prejudice, so that they return to a life of crime or die.

In the State School I went to in Copacabana, I ran for the student council and was elected president. I faced the Municipal and State directors to ensure that the schoolyard was available for those studying at night for them to do Physical Education. We also denounced the commercialization of the food in the canteen and asked that snack be replaced with proper meals. We also asked that the laboratories be reactivated as they were serving as storage spaces. I was asked to participate in the youth wing of the Worker's Party called REBEL, and to participate in the National Student Union and the Brazilian Union of Secondary School Students in Mogi das Cruzes, in the interior of São Paulo. There I met people with different party ideologies, though with strength and leadership. There I had my first political lesson.

In October 2002, we received financial support for our activities [at AAJT/RJ] and in December, during the IV State Meeting of Working Adolescents and Youths, we were elected with a majority by the 185 participants of the event. I was elected to the role of vice-president for a period of three years. In August 2003 I had the honour of participating in

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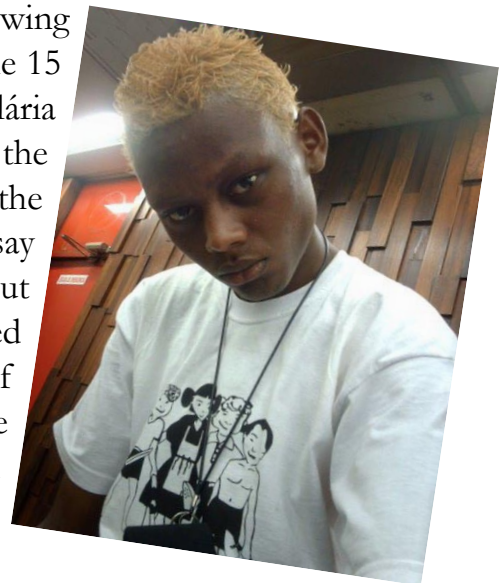
<sup>10</sup> FUNABEM (National Foundation for the Well-being of Minors) were internment institutions for orphans and marginalized children. Up until their dissolution with the new Child and Adolescent Statute of 1990, it was common practice to intern marginalized children (orphans, street children, children in conflict with the law) in these state-run institutions.

the opening panel of the State Forum for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour and for the Protection of Working Adolescents, of which the Association is member. As I did there at the Forum, I would also like to leave here the following segment from the song by Geraldo Vandré:

*“Come, let us go now,  
because waiting is not wise  
Who knows acts in time,  
and does not wait for things to happen”*

In 2003, I had to tell the funders of the Association the fact that through bad administration and lack of respect, the president was falsifying cheques and signatures, stealing part of the grant of the comrades. They chose to suspend their financial support. So everyone started to leave as they needed to contribute to household expenses, this is a big problem that affects the militancy of youth.

I met Udi (coordinator of the project Cultures of Participation) at the event commemorating 15 years of the Child and Adolescent Statute in the Noel Rosa Theatre, at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. On this occasion I made the statement at the panel that in an event that spoke about children, adolescent and youth, they did not have a single representative on the panel. They were only present in the audience in order to give attendance certificates to the event’s participants and legal experts who did not concern themselves with what young people had to say. I encouraged young people not to stay silent before the facts, to stop any event and say “this is wrong”. The following day, there was another commemoration of the 15 years of the Statute, a march from the Candelária Church to the Cinelândia Square, in front of the Municipal Council in Rio’s city center. I had the opportunity to go onto the sound truck and say a little about the AAJT/RJ and also spoke about the abuse of some police-officers. I argued that the question was not to lower the age of criminal responsibility but to provide more opportunities, I also said that we need to rebel in order to do something further on.<sup>11</sup>





On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2005 I got together with a group of friends in order to elect a new administration for the Association, as well as to try to get in touch with the funders again. I really fought to stay on in the Association but unfortunately I did not get any replies and was also forced to find another way of sustaining myself. I got a job, though I knew that it was not for me, I knew there was something missing in my life. During my days off I carried on trying to get in touch with the funders, trying to get some funds for the association.

In March 2006, together with Cláudia, a psychologist from Childhope Brazil, I managed to get in touch again with the funders through phone calls to Holland. They agreed to support our activities, asking us to send them our activities report once again. As they promised, on schedule in April 2006 the first instalment of the funding arrived. Our activities in 2006 were focussed exclusively on strengthening our base, calling our associates in order to fight for our rights that are being taken away.

Around October 2006, I was privileged enough to attend the March of the President and presidential candidate for re-election of behalf of the Worker's Party, Luiz Inácio LULA da Silva, together with the State governor candidate of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), Sérgio Cabral, from the Candelária Square to the Cinelândia Square in Rio's city center. In the middle of the hustle-and-bustle of the crowd, I managed, together with the vice-president of the Association, to go through a security barrier and give president LULA a T-shirt and a pamphlet of the Association. We took a photo of him, we had the honour of seeing him wipe the sweat of his brow with our shirt. Even if he does not keep the shirt, at least he will know that we exist.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2006, I was arrested for passing by a march and stopping to look at the military police, whose duty is to protect society, beating up someone who had fallen to the floor and who was not reacting. I was taken to the Police Station where I stayed with two

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<sup>11</sup> Over the last couple of years debates have raged on in Brazil about lowering the age of criminal responsibility from 18 as set by law in the Child and Adolescent Statute. Those who want the age limit lowered argue that adolescents are responsible for the increasing rise in urban crime but are immune from prosecution. Such claims are on the whole groundless as the Statute does contain provisions for those in conflict with the law, and the crimes committed by young people make up only a small proportion of overall crime.





more people from the march in a room 4m by 4m, with a hole on the floor and a really bad smell, for two hours. I was accused of telling an officer to “piss off” and resisting arrest, which did not happen. The three of us were released by a lawyer from the syndicate who said that I could claim damages from the State for prejudice, as the police-officer was white, tall and strong. In 2007 the case will go on trial, but despite this I will not abandon the struggle, because I was not on the march, and even if I was, there is nothing wrong in going on a demonstration nor is it against the law, and when it comes to workers, the Association will always offer support, no matter what cost. I leave with the following phrase:

“Rain or shine, we are workers, the blood that was shed by those who believed in a better future will not be forgotten”.

These are some thoughts and texts that I believe in:<sup>12</sup>

1. “Worthy of admiration is he who having tripped in the first step, stands up and strides on” (Carlos Fox);
2. “Those we love never die; they only leave before us” (A. Nervo);
3. “Never walk on the well-trodden path, as it will only take you where others have been” (Graham Bell);
4. “There is always a bit of madness in love, however there is always a bit of reason in madness” (F. Nietzsche);
5. “Love is the most abstract as well as most powerful force in the world” (Mahatma Gandhi);
6. “The powerful can kill one, two or three roses, but will never be able to stop spring” (Che Guevara);
7. “If you tremble with indignation before an injustice in the world, then we are comrades” (Che Guevara);
8. “The key foundation of our work is youth” (Che Guevara);
9. “Running the risk of appearing ridiculous, let me tell you that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love” (Che Guevara);
10. “Hasta la victoria siempre” (Che Guevara).

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<sup>12</sup> These sayings are translated from the text in Portuguese.

# The South of Brazil

Quênia Lopes



## Quênia Lopes de Moraes,

23 years old, born in Porto Alegre raised in the district of Rio Branco, known as the old African Colony. She currently lives in Rio de Janeiro and studies pedagogy at the Estácio de Sá University.

Since the beginning of 2002 she has development a number of artistic projects with the rap group Anastácias, in which she is a DJ. At the end of 2002 together with her friends from this group she created an artisan and hair-platting cooperative called Ubuzima. Since then, they have been engaged in events, fashion shows and debates around the question of black women's self esteem.

Quênia believes that being an activist is to be engaged with current social issues. It is about giving strength above everything and creating new ways that attempt to improve an excluded social group. That is, a constant search for the inclusion of everyone.



I was born in Rio Grande do Sul, a cold State, (mostly) with people who are also cold, though in a warm and caring family, with a strong blood of warriors.<sup>13</sup> Daughter of a mum and dad who were militants in the Black Movement, I grew up surrounded by ethnic pictures, books and toys, which did not stop me from going through all sorts of identity crisis through which a black child goes through, such as: “why is my hair curly?” Or even, “why does it not stay like that of the other girls?” In “trying” to make it like that of the other white girls, I often caught myself wrapping a towel or cloth around my head, in the illusion that one day my curly locks would be straight and flowing. These days talking to my black friends I see that I was not the only one doing this.

My mum though always gave us the support she could, trying to make us see how beautiful we were with our hair and skin tone. She always bought black dolls, brought back books that worked with afro themes, but unfortunately or fortunately most of our days were spent in school. That would be the place where we would create our identity, as the duty of the school is to make us into citizens who are ever more critically aware. However, if the pedagogies adopted are not the most suitable, trying to be mindful of differences, school can ruin the life of a child, as the possible psychological traumas can stay for life.

Writing about the theme of school, I remember of an event I witnessed when I went to university in Tapes, in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul: one day my history professor proposed a debate about whether black people had an influence in the formation of Rio Grande do Sul. Unfortunately what was supposed to have been a study group turned into an exposition of prejudiced ideas by students who were not interested in historical facts. It was a very uncomfortable lesson. After

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<sup>13</sup> The State of Rio Grande do Sul, at the far south of Brazil, has a much larger white population than elsewhere in the country, the region being marked by German and Italian immigration for over a hundred years.



publishing on the Internet a small manifesto I wrote about this, there were a number of statements of support for my position, particularly from organizations of the Black Movement around this cause, which is not only mine but of a whole nation.

Today I see that if I did not have the support of my family, and specially of my parents, I would certainly have given it all up, as the psychological pressure that I and my friend had to face in that university was not easy.

Historical data shows that the black population of Rio Grande do Sul is around 15% in the whole State and 20% in the city of Porto Alegre. So the majority of the population is not black. Even in state schools, rarely are we the majority and it is not uncommon for us to be the only black person in the classroom. This may well be one of the reasons for truancy.

During pre-school days, if I remember rightly, we were only two black girls in the classroom – something that has not changed much. All the teachers were white. On TV all the presenters were white. So what would my reference of beauty be??? It is complicated only having one reference of the beautiful in a stage where you are creating your identity. You are making friends, making up your group in which “we are all equal”, we have “the same toys”, the same white dolls. Yes, but the same as my white friends. And this difference I only noticed when my mum arrived with a black doll. You can say that at that moment I was very shocked: “What do you mean???” “Who told her that I wanted to be different?” “And who told her that I wanted a BLACK doll??” Not to say, curly hair. That doll called Luana was for me the last straw. How different would I be from my friends who had Xuxa?<sup>14</sup> No one knew who Luana was! I didn’t know and didn’t care. This understanding of what it is to be the same and what is to be different I only came to acquire over the years.

So then adolescence arrives, 15 years old, the time to start going to parties. I was already beginning to feel comfortable with myself. However, going to parties with my friends was a drag: the boys never looked at me. It was always at them, the white girls, the more beautiful.

One day, I met up with some black girl-friends, also daughters of black activists, who were going through the same identity crisis

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<sup>14</sup> Xuxa, a very famous Brazilian children’s TV presenter with a range of products for children, is white, with blue eyes and blond hair.

as me. Together we went to a Black Movement event on Perdão Street, where some black dignitaries were going to be presented by the Anastácia Prize. Amongst them, my mum. After receiving her award, my mum made an impassioned speech about the struggle of black women who, like Anastácia, will not be silenced by any muzzle.<sup>15</sup>

After the speeches there were a few shows and one of them was by a rap group. Me and my friends got chatting to some of the guys and they invited us to a break-dancing circle on the Praia Street, in the center of Porto Alegre. This was when Hip Hop entered my life and provoked a profound change. I started having an afro hair-style, seeking more information about my culture, and talking more with my dad who is a journalist and has written many books about the 'black question' as well



*Anastácias Group*

as working with video in order to rescue our history. I also started to talk more to my mum. Both had a lot to teach me. I realised that I had everything at home and that it was only a question of identification which, for sure, made all the difference in my life.

When I started going to break-dance circles, I saw happy black people, saw aware black people. It was a movement of self-affirmation, and I was very happy to be part of this movement of liberation that was, mainly, freeing my mind. This shock of awareness changed my life. In less than four months me and my friends already had a rap group made up only of black women, with the name of *Anastácias* because it identified us with the life-story of this warrior woman. With this group we won national prizes in music, with our work being recognised in the media throughout the country.

It was during this time that I started working more actively with social movements. In 2002 we, the *Anastácias*, decided to put together an artisan cooperative, called *Ubuzima* ("the union of body and soul" in Yorubá).

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<sup>15</sup> Anastácia was a woman slave who is venerated in Brazil as symbol of the struggle against slavery in the country.



The group Anastácias kept putting on shows and taking part in events connected to Hip Hop culture. You can say that for a long time the Anastácias were the only all-women rap group in the whole of Rio Grande do Sul. Perhaps that is why we were considered as a reference in the Porto Alegre rap scene.

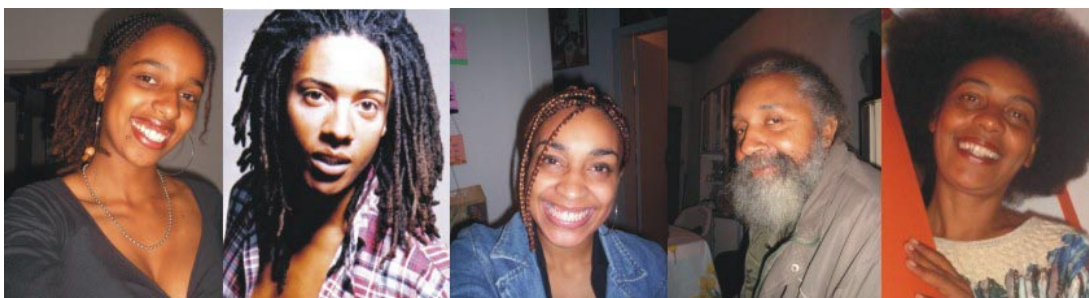
Meanwhile Ubuzima was focussing more on the question of black women's self-esteem. At first it emerged as an ideological logo and then became almost an NGO. We started putting on events where fashion shows, debates and discussions took place. Themes like earning an income for the Hip Hop folk were recurrent in our events. We always sought to work together with other people from the movement itself who had already been developing something along these lines.

To participate is a moment in which you propose to work for something that really seems true. Participation involves a pledge to what you believe in and with what is being proposed.

From the moment in which I decided to participate in a group, a rap group or a cooperative, I realised how important it is to be in a constant search for knowledge. I realised how important it is to pass on to young people like me, the damage that racism can cause to a child who grows up psychologically damaged, because she doesn't see herself on TV or is discriminated in school. It is not possible not to be at least a little affected by racism in a racist society like ours.

Participating in the construction of a new society is the duty of everyone who decides to involve themselves with current social questions. It is about supporting existing proposals and, importantly, creating new proposals. But the important thing is that we are in a constant search for knowledge. We need to struggle for the social inclusion of a community that, despite being a part of this country, was also very important in its construction.

I believe that without an acknowledgement of the role of black people in Brazilian society we will never be a whole nation.



*Family*

## *I*identity

*Brought by force, from far away, by the whip  
For smokes, and sugar cane  
Our lives swapped and sold  
Without a chance or escape the origins of this chaos in the favelas and ghettos  
Of the bandit's life  
Who knows till when we can stand it  
The hypocrisy of false democracy  
The union of the people of the Brazilian race  
That one people benefits  
And enslaves the other, their whole life  
Denying us all the time  
Afraid of the black face  
Speak about the bum, the body  
We have space in the media once a year  
To see the "mulata's" bum, smiling swinging her hips  
The black man is feared and is an object  
He is hot, well endowed, always ready for sex  
The cheapest meat in the market is black meat  
Cut up, humiliated, served on a plate  
Like our art and our culture  
Disfigured, thrown back at us  
History badly told, omitted, no one says a thing  
Hiding the pain, not showing the colour  
It seems like a joke in bad taste when heard  
Since a child, blackness is like monkeyness  
This is the tactic to subjugate  
But we have our weapons and strength to fight  
To defend our afro origins, our way of being  
Equality of condition is what we want  
Black man, black woman  
Direction for our future which it is said is black is dark  
Yes it will be, WE ARE VERY PROUD!!!*

*(Lyrics by Denise - Anastácias Group)*



# Without Vocation to be a Puppet

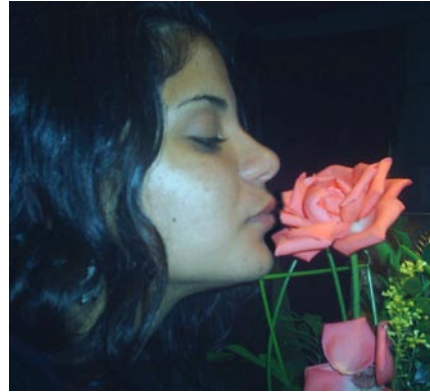
Manuelle Rosa



## Manuelle Fonseca Rosa,

21 years old, born in the city of Rio de Janeiro and raised in the district of Alto da Boa Vista, where she lives to this day.

She studies Social Communication, specializing in Journalism, at the Pontiffic Catholic University of Rio de Janerio – PUC- Rio.



Since the beginning of 2004 she has been a volunteer coordinator of the community pre-university exam of Vila Cachoeira, in Alto da Boa Vista.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of 2004 she participated in the process of implementation in her district of the Community Newspaper FalandoALTO, through the NGO OSCIP ALTOSustentável, staying in the project until October 2006, where she worked as a coordinator, reporter, photographer, editor and copy-editor.

She believes that militancy is a vocation for all, as it is motivated by the desire of all human beings to feel free and act directly in the world that surrounds them, transforming it. However, she knows that not everyone will follow this path, as you need a lot of commitment, struggle and courage to face the difficulties that come along with the pleasures of participation.

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<sup>16</sup> Pre-university exams [pré-vestibular] are entrance exams for universities that all students leaving secondary education must do. Because of the quality of public sector education, those who cannot afford private schooling or the private courses that prepare students for these exams are at a considerable disadvantage. As a result, only a small number of people from low-income families go to university. This has prompted the proliferation of free or low cost community courses (often in *favela* communities) to prepare young people from impoverished backgrounds for this entrance exam.

*“This wanting to be exactly what we are will lead us beyond”*

*Paulo Leminski*

What is this participation business?

I grew up in the Alto da Boa Vista, a unique district. In the middle of the metropolis of Rio de Janeiro, the Alto, which is found in the middle of the biggest urban forest in the world, is like a town from the countryside. Here, everyone knows each other, knows each other's name. Here children's play still has not been completely substituted by computers.

Between the well-known games of tag, playing on the street and bathing in the waterfall, I grew up loving the forest and repeating the old belief that “in the Alto, nothing moves on”. I got used to the idea of living in a place where there is no pharmacy, no hospital, post-office or bank. I got used to living in a district that had a precarious health center, a mini market and a newspaper stand that hardly worked. However, something happened. Today this old belief does not belong to me anymore.

Encouraged by my friends, around the age of fifteen I started to participate in a church group for adolescents near my house. It was fun to get together with friends every week, go on outings, parties... but the more I got involved, the more serious things got. After one year I was coordinator of the group, organizing weekly meetings and events. Even without being sure of my ability in this role, I simply could not abandon the post, as the feeling of being useful to others comforted me. However, with time I become disillusioned with the Catholic doctrine and started to realise that I could be useful inside and outside the church.

In 2003, when I was 17 years old, I was on the seventh year of secondary school and needed to get ready for the University entrance exams. Through friends I discovered a community pre-university exams course that was close by my house and which I had never noticed before. There I came across a kind of work that I had only seen before in church: people from different districts, some even very far from Alto, giving lessons voluntarily. On Saturdays, us students had to clean the classroom. On top of this, we participated in events to raise funds for the project. Everything without being paid, or rather, we received so much that at that moment it was difficult to see the size of the treasure.

I confess that, differently from some classmates, it was no

martyrdom for me to work for “free” in the course washing the floor or selling raffle tickets, as I already had some experience of this from time in church. Whoever has worked in parish events, with scarce resources and helpers, knows what I am talking about. We end up doing everything, from cleaning the toilets to counting up the funds.

At the end of 2003 I found out I had passed the exam to study Social Communication in PUC-Rio. It was through the course that I managed to get a full-time study grant, for during this time PUC was a partner of a number of community pre-university entrance exam courses. It was also at the end of that year that me and some classmates decided to take on the coordination of the course, as we had felt abandoned by the directors at that time.

We started from almost nothing but in just a month managed to get voluntary teachers for all subjects, something that initially had seemed impossible. It was then that I discovered that there are always people willing to help, ready to participate.

Many of my classmates from the 2003 course did not pass the university entrance exam as I did and tried again the following year. This time almost everyone passed, and knowing that I had a little role in this, my heart fills with joy to overflowing, even today.

A unique opportunity, a pioneering act!

As soon as I got into university I wanted to do work experience to fill the time between classes and participating in the community course – today called Pré-Vestibular Comunitário Vila Cachoeira – for I never managed to keep still for long, I always had the need to be doing something “useful”. However, nothing was coming up, until the July holidays opportunity came knocking on my door, or rather, phoned me up: I was invited to be part of a team in the NGO OSCIP ALTOSustentável that was going to create the first community newspaper of the district.

I have to confess that at first I was worried that it would not work out, that the newspaper would not last or that we would not have much to write about, as my feeling was that nothing relevant happened in Alto. All these thoughts were because of the negative beliefs about the district that I had learnt from an early age. However, being in touch with the team from the newspaper, I became motivated, the desire to

do something new, to contribute something to the district infected me.

The first edition came out in December 2004 with the name FalandoALTO, suggested by local people. Since then the newspaper has become a big part of my life. There were sleepless nights taken up by work, weekends filled with interviews and writing.

I started as reporter and writer, and sometimes photographer. In November 2005, when the previous coordinator left the project, I took over coordinating the newspaper, as well as carrying on with other tasks. The work doubled, and the rewards too. I am happy for having chosen to stay on in the team and today, 21 years old, for having already learnt so much about my profession and about people.

## Lessons that you do not learn in the classroom

Journalism is a profession that gives you the privilege of getting to know different places and a diversity of people. Everyday is unique. And working in Alto da Boa Vista has helped me to see the district with different eyes. Alto is made up of more than ten communities and I did not know many of them before working in the community newspaper. Beyond this, I had never thought about many of the issues that were covered in the paper through the suggestion of local people.

With this work, beyond getting to know more about the practice of journalism, I became aware of some aspects about human beings. The first and most obvious is that everyone has the need to talk, to communicate. Even those that are more shy, when they feel secure in an interview, they talk until there is no more tape left to record. Local people have the need to talk about what afflicts them, what is wrong in the district and which no one

mentions, or even about the positive things there, but which few people notice. The community newspaper became a loud-speaker for all this.

Another lesson I learnt is that positive examples lead to positive



*On top of Pedra Bonita, with Pedra da Gavea in the background, natural beauty in the district that I love.*

actions. Just as in the pre-university course it was necessary that a group mobilized itself to change the situation and include new people in the project, I see that the newspaper, or rather community participation as a whole, increasingly stimulates action.

There are people who are pioneers, starting up a dream that seemed distant and that when this dream becomes tangible, ends up stimulating other people to participate. Clearly there are people who do not believe in positive actions and prefer to continue mumbling about life rather than seeing what is in front of them. However, as a whole, love, and subsequently unity, overcome apparently insurmountable obstacles.

**A**nd the difficulties?

Not everything is a bed of roses in community work. Often we come across some difficulties and we need to acknowledge and face them.

In October 2006, close to the newspaper's second anniversary, we had to suspend our activities because of a problem frequently encountered by social projects: lack of money. On top of this we realised we had to evaluate our work to see what did not work out so that we could restructure some aspects, such as seeking commercial partners, for instance, in order to make the newspaper sustainable, something we did not manage in those two years.

It then became necessary for OSCIP to pause or reduce a number of its projects in order to look for funding and also to restructure. During this moment I decided to leave. After more than two years in the institution, I felt and feel that it is necessary to go out of the community and see other worlds, so that, when I go back, I have more baggage to be able to contribute to my district. Further than this, I also want to get closer to the audio-visual area, the sector that interests me the most in Communication.

But don't think it was easy to leave a project to which I dedicated two years. At the same time that I wanted to work in an area that was not the printed press (also to acquire more professional experience, for in a years' time I will be graduating and entering the fierce job market), I could not switch off from the project knowing its importance for me and for the community. I was afraid that leaving the project was a betrayal of my principles and that I would disappoint all those people who believed in my work.

Since I started working in the newspaper I became a reference figure for the community, as did other members of the team. We are the



“journalists from Alto”. When I worked there, and even today, some locals looked for me in order to place their complaints in the paper, others to compliment and thank us for our work. There are still others who did not believe that the newspaper would “go forward”, and who today anxiously wait for the next edition. When I am questioned about the next edition, I become sad and embarrassed to say that the newspaper is not going at the full steam it once was. But I am sure that this project is in good hands and will certainly resurface in an even better shape.

This time of change has made me think about the difficulties that arise in participation. Whoever participates in some social project ends up falling in love with the work and it hurts to have to choose, in certain moments, between your personal growth and the work being carried out. It is also difficult to face the harsh reality that without money it is virtually impossible to survive in this world.

Of course participation contributes a lot in your personal development, but when you are involved in community work, you also have to be aware of your own needs, rather than being only aware of the needs of others. Sometimes you need to be a little selfish, to assess whether that work which is helping others is also suitable for you in that moment of your life.

Another very important thing: who participates generally has the idea that they are going to change the world, but it is necessary to assess the actual conditions and be aware that your work is not going to change everything from one moment to the next. Despite the importance of being sure that your attitude has value and that it can help transform some lives, it is good to be aware so that you never put yourself as some god, being mindful that there are outside factors that will come to affect your work.

**D**espite this I choose...

After having participated in a project like the newspaper FalandoAlto, after having witnessed some lives being transformed in the community pre-university course, I do not see my life apart from Participation. It is a fact that the district where I live still needs a number of things, but the difference is that today I

believe that you can change things. Observing nature, the seasons, the evolution of the species, History, it would be wrong to presume that things cannot change, that the place where I was raised should remain intact, without alterations or improvements. To think in this way would be to subjugate my capacity to choose and to transform reality.

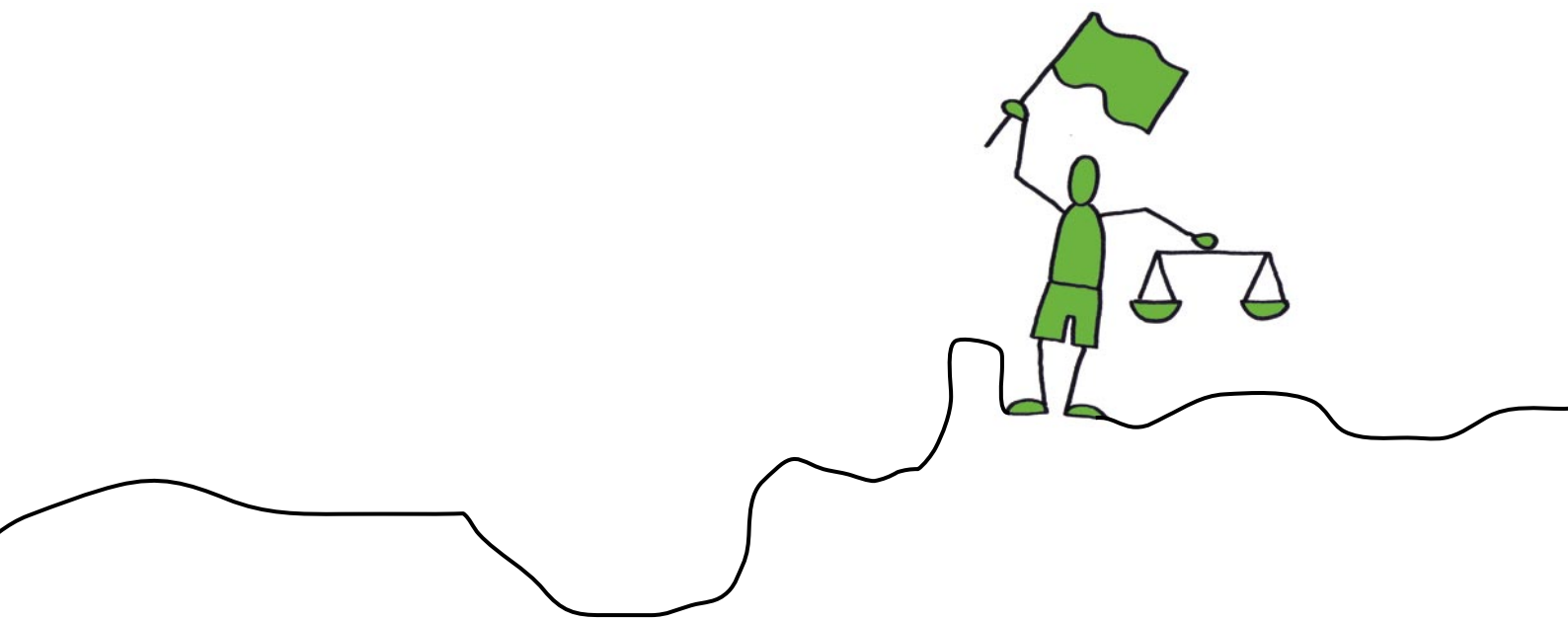
I prefer to live in a blue world of dreams than to continue repeating the old discouraging belief that I have heard from an early age, condemning the future of my district and passing on this tragic inheritance to future generations. I choose to change the course of history. I choose to perfect myself in my profession and use it to improve my environment. I choose to unite with those who desire to do something new instead of condemning as invalid the future of Alto da Boa Vista, and consequently my future. I prefer to live dreams, realising possible actions, than to sentence myself as incapable of effecting change.

At the end of the day, it would not make sense to live in a world in which I was only a puppet. I think that you and me are more than that.



# Attitude to Make a Difference

Leandro Paiacon



## Leandro Marques Ferreira,

Or Leandro Paíacan, as he is better known, is 24 years old and was born in the Morro do Dendê, on Ilha do Governador, where he lived with his brothers until he was 19 years old. He grew up seeing close by, some social problems that everyone knows about, like violence, poverty, inequality, and especially prejudice. He became part of a team of volunteers in 2002 when he started to frequent the Grupo Arco-Íris de Conscientização Homossexual [Rainbow Group for Homosexual Awareness], participating in the Project for Prevention of STDs/AIDS in Sexual Diversity for three years.



Since then, amongst other projects, he has participated in the coordination of the Pride Parade<sup>17</sup> (for Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgender); in the project Atitude Hora H developed by John Snow Institute Brazil; and in the creation of the short film made by the Promundo Institute “Afraid of What?” His most recent participation has been in the research carried out by ABIA (Brazilian AIDS Interdisciplinary Association), about the developments and setbacks of AIDS in Rio de Janeiro.

He currently lives in the district of Laranjeiras with friends, whom he considers an alternative family. He is in his first year of studying Business Administration and regrets not being able to be as close to the Third sector and voluntary work as he would like. He hopes to carry on fighting against machismo and for sexual equality, trying to be of help and especially to be more informed. In his opinion, information is the only way to break down barriers and get to a more just society, not only around sexuality, but also in questions of race, culture and social issues in general.

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<sup>17</sup> The Gay Parade, an annual event in the city of Rio, is one of the biggest events in the city's calendar, attracting hundreds of thousands to the streets of Copacabana.

## Old routine

Before, I was someone who was practically invisible. I was born and grew up in the hill-shanty of Dendê, in Ilha do Governador. I went out of my house and came back with my head lowered, scared of people, with a shyness that was almost an illness. I already had my small sexual experiences, with cousins or neighbours, but always afraid. I was the “little fag” of the classroom, of the street. The “little fag” son of dona Maria. Not for being effeminate, but for being shy, for not having friends, for not talking, for not going out... I did not learn to do these things, no one ever taught me.

## The Eyes

*Sometimes, I only see  
Most times... I just see  
Sometimes I admire  
But when I dream, I don't see  
And when I get back, and see, I cry  
And when I cry, I only see  
Without hope, attachments, I only see  
The leaking, the place, the people...  
I only see  
And cry  
Because in my dream, I never see*

*If I only dream, I will never see  
But if I cry, maybe I will see  
What I really want  
For my whole life  
My mum I see  
My brother I see  
My sister I see  
Her life, I see  
I am only afraid to see someone...  
This one, I don't see  
I close my eyes.*

*Leandro Marques, 12<sup>th</sup> January, without hope for 2002.*

## The beginning of Gay life and militancy

Alone, but not in the worse kind of way, I went into the gay world kind of twisted... for a moment, only for a moment, I thought it would be perfect. When I saw those boys with whom I “played” sex at the beginning of adolescence, starting to date women, having children, marrying and leaving me behind, I became aware that we did not consider this playing in the same way. I wanted more, wanted to carry on, until I met Luiz, around

32 years old, tall, dark and very handsome. When I met him, for me he was the most wonderful man in the world with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life. I remember every detail of that night. Especially every word. During this night I discovered someone who was part of a world in which I could live. He told me things about his long-term relationships, parties, friends... gay friends? Gay parties? Relationships? I left there overwhelmed by him and his world, completely in love with my newest super hero.

It lasted one year, not my passion for him, but my search. That night was the first and the last that I saw Luiz. He only wanted a night of sex with an urchin, and he did it. After a long time trying to understand, I went to a psychologist who unfortunately did not help me very much, as things were not as rational as I would like them to be. Following advice or devouring self-help books was not working. During this time my mum had noticed my constant sobbing, but she rarely came close. It was fear I think. Finally after this time I stopped trying to understand all this. It was the best thing I could have done. At this moment I opened myself up to get to know (by myself) this world of which I had always dreamt. Once again I was overwhelmed and my doorway was the Internet.

*I am an idiot  
I am a jerk  
I am a dreamer  
I think that it will work  
What is impossible to think about  
Distance...  
Maturity...  
Independence...  
Occupation...  
And me. Me? On my feet?!  
Have shame Leandro  
Having another by your side  
You are going to look for silver elsewhere?  
Give time to time  
Things will revert  
I will have other treasures!!*

*Leandro, 03/08/2002, ready to grow!*

Amongst new friendships, new nightclubs and casual sex, I lived a little lost at first, but always very thoughtful. The gay world loves fresh meat, a disingenuous little kid, and I was a hit at this! For a while I was overwhelmed with it all, but then the big question came... “is this all there is?” I saw my hetero friends having relationships, my neighbours marrying and my brother having a child. And would I remain the rest of my life in an obscure world? I loved this, but it was practically the same thing that I did with my neighbours, just with other people. It was at this time that I started paying attention to details I had not noticed before. It was at a club in Tijuca that I met João Henrique, or simply, Joãozinho, militant of the Grupo Arco-Íris de Conscientização Homossexual, always giving out condoms there.

## The Grupo Arco-Íris

I “nagged” Joãozinho. He for me was something different. Gay Group? This could be something new so that I would not go into the routine that was awaiting me. There was a leap. Already in my first Gay Parade, at the end of the 2002 World Cup, I was invited by the then president Cláudio Nascimento, to participate in the Group. I started coming to the house and seeing something different, something new. People talking about respect and freedom... but not only that. Talking about all sorts of trivial things too! But these were gays and lesbians expressing their sexuality which, anywhere else, I would have had to hide. I thought it was fantastic and invited many to come and join. As many did not turn up, I noticed that this “militancy” business was not for everyone, especially for

young people. I understand that, at this phase of searching, with the hormones bubbling through the skin... The fact is that it never bothered me being an exception. To tell you the truth I don't think that we need to be politically correct all of the time, but I also think that we are very far from all this. I see that young people are not



*Photo for the Newspaper Folha de São Paulo – 2006*

aware of the basics about their rights and obligations, and that is not good.

For gay youths, information is even more important. How will we defend ourselves from so much prejudice and discrimination that we are subject to in showing who we are? How will we break the prejudices that we have internalised inside ourselves? This prejudice that makes us inferior and makes us believe that, though intelligent and determined, that we are smaller than a heterosexual. When there was an opportunity to go into a STD/AIDS prevention project, the same as the one in which Joãozinho participated, I confess that I did not accept it as I felt I was already a militant, these things... I saw the project as a therapy to loose my shyness and earn a little extra cash. Sometime later, I saw that I was good at it. Since then I have taken part in seminars, meetings, talks, movements... all guided towards the acceptance of sexuality and against discrimination, something that has taught me to be respectful and demand respect. People already see me as "Leaondro from Arco-Íris", or simply as the "condom guy".

It does have its not so good side, as often people see me as an E.T.: "a young guy giving out condoms at the door of the night-club?" "Talking about homosexual politics and inviting us to this Arco-Íris?" I have been called sick, HIV positive, a show-off swat. This bothered me at first. I stayed a while wanting a serious relationship and did not manage, and ended up thinking it was like that... some say it is not, but I never completely convinced myself. Most young people see Arco-Íris as a place where old people wearing thick glasses discuss things like world peace or the destruction of the ozone layer. A group that is only good for organizing the Gay Parade.

## **M**y mum, my family and other projects

I never did get on with my family, my aunties, my cousins... I was always thought of as the "little fag" of the street and they agreed. These things always drove me away from family reunions and other topics. I felt the lack of what I saw in my neighbours' home, that unity, organization and interest in each other's lives. Of course, today I know that things are not that perfect, and that everyone has problems, but before I did not see it that way.

During one of these militant activities, my life changed a lot. I always wanted to leave home, I always made many plans to change my life in an organized way, as almost every gay does I think. During this period, my mum had already discovered that I was gay while she was going

through my things and found photos of me in the Gay Parade. We had already gone through all that phase of sobbing and the classic questions: “where did I go wrong?!” “What have I done to deserve this?!” To tell you the truth, she was already beginning to accept it, though only inside the house. But it was just someone outside (cousins, neighbours) to give a comment that the house fell apart. Now she rarely mentions the topic.

In December 2004 a politician and homophobic evangelical pastor tried to pass a law in the State Assembly saying that the State should invest tax payer’s money into “curing” homosexuals. The Grupo Arco-Íris together with other NGOs organized a demonstration outside the Assembly. I was there with my boyfriend at the time. All the press were there. Me and my boyfriend, two ordinary people in front of all those folk, like any other couple... seems beautiful? For the press it was a feast! The following day we were all over the cover: “gays demonstrate outside the Assembly doors”.

My mum’s head spun 360 degrees, she almost flipped out. We went through a new heavy situation, with which my mum did not know how to cope. She said things to me that traumatized me, strong words that I, to be honest, have blocked from memory. For a long time I did not go back home. When I got myself together again emotionally we started talking again, but even today everything is very delicate. If I asked to go back home she would accept me, without doubt, but this was the opportunity I had for a big change. Away from my family’s energy and having to get by on my own, my life improved a lot. Arco-Íris was an important base for me, a base for which I will always be grateful. Up to today I have never been angry with anyone, especially my mum. She is a wonderful person, she just did not learn how to deal with life, no one ever knew how to teach her.

Now I was out of home, struggling to get a job that would pay me. I got really attached to my friends, to Arco-Íris. I also started to develop and to make myself available to some social projects by other NGOs such as Promundo, where I have worked with social marketing for the reduction of machismo. Recently I have also participated in the research carried out by ABIA (Brazilian AIDS Interdisciplinary Association), about the developments and setbacks of AIDS in Brazil. Arco-Íris’ Prevention Project had already managed to raise my self-esteem and to lower my shyness.

Changes...

You know when everything is so perfect that we begin to suspect that something is wrong? There I was living in a kind of private world... my militancy in Arco-Íris was going well, I worked to pay my bills and went to friends' houses to drink and chat. Until one day a bomb blew up on my head. A misunderstanding with a friend showed me that I had not learnt how to sift my friendships, that I could not distinguish between friends, colleagues and acquaintances, that I had not learnt to give out in doses my sincere words and character. I have always been clear about what I do and like. I have never denied my "flirting", my relationships, my ideas and my desire to acknowledge who I am. This bothered many people, because many judged me the "little perfect wrong guy". One thing is for sure: in the gay world many people like what they do not admit to liking and have low self-esteem. No it did not matter, I had learnt that big problems are big opportunities... I was not going to miss out on this one.

I went to live with Eliana and her group, in Laranjeiras. It is a well-off district, everything very beautiful. Eliana is like a super mum whom I met in Arco-Íris. It was great, but this is not what I wanted yet. I wanted to let myself go! I was the little perfect guy? Now I wanted to be the rebellious one, to "let my hair down". I wanted, very consciously, to know the other side... and I did. I started to frequent the perfect place: Space Club, a night-club in Barra, with a lot of techno music, drugs and flirting and many, many people living by their image. I met the right people. Made great friends, many of whom I am still in touch with today. Others only noticed me after I started going out with the club's owner. I got to know the futile gay world, which was even cool for a while. Of course, all this partying forced me to move away from activism. "The Leandro who used to distribute condoms in front of Cine Ideal now is living it up completely lost", that is what they all said. It was all out gossip! Ilha do





Governador did not speak of anything else, and the people from Arco-Íris Group were disappointed in me. But I needed to go through this and dive into the pool full of nothing. Having said this I was fully aware and tired of it quickly, tired of having to smile all the time for everyone. Of course there were many good things during this time, as I said, I do not regret it, but being away from militancy was not good for me.

I realised the need for people to have a unique and unchangeable identity. I would prefer never to have to define myself in these terms, like: liberal gay, hetero introverted, active, passive... What is the problem? Am I an abnormal gay? No, I am only someone who likes to be free, sexual.

After getting to know new places, new people, of having new experiences and almost killing myself a number of times, I decided to stop. All this lasted about six months. Enough for me to learn all that I wanted. Such as how to behave, how to have fun, how to go on with my life. It is now that I have started to enjoy the wonderful people with whom I lived and live up to this day, and to dedicate myself to the work that sustains me. Going back to militancy took a while, but everything has started to go well again.

## Perspective

After the rush of the 31st of July this year, when we did the 11th Gay Pride, I had to stop to think about all this. I am getting to that phase where we discover that militancy is not as simple as we would like and where differences of opinion are inevitable.

Due to financial and administrative issues, the Arco-Íris Group had lost a little of its stability sometime ago, but nothing that could not be resolved. I am very grateful for the trust that Arco-Íris has in me. In groups where work is hard, we cannot forget to be gentle and to remember that we are all there because we love all of that.

This year I had to run around all of the rainy sea-front of Copacabana all day long, without being able to be with my friends. I heard orders the whole week rarely with “please” and “thank you”. And in the end I had to wait sitting down for a phone call to give me space to talk about the mistakes made. Seems sad? It isn’t! It was more than made up by the compliments from NGOs who saw my work, receiving messages on Orkut and e-mails saying congratulations. I did my bit. Arco-Íris is my home too, my family, and it was there that I shaped the mind that I have today and

achieved my personal acceptance. Today my objectives are clear. Honestly, I do not see myself as president of Arco-Íris one day, nor any other group, but I really like participating, helping, being there, making a difference.

This is the second year in which I have been entrusted, together with other volunteers, to coordinate the Gay Parade. Last year I cried when I lifted up my head after a whole morning of stress, and saw that multitude dancing happily. Everyone there, everyone present in Rio de Janeiro's third biggest annual event. I cried with emotion knowing that I had helped to make that happen. I remembered when I was the invisible boy in school, without friends, alone, scared of looking out of the window. I thought: "Oh my God, I did this! I spent a whole month inside Arco-Íris, organizing this and look what has happened! Everyone here." Cláudio Nascimento, seeing my emotion, hugged me and said "cool, isn't it Leandro?" Cool? That was more than cool for me, it was magic! It was everything I needed to get over low self-esteem, to get over everything! To go to a place and get to know a bunch of people, to get on well with them, not be frustrated, to be a fighter, always in a good mood... all this I owe to my participation as a young person in all the demonstrations, all the projects, all the nights in front of night-clubs...

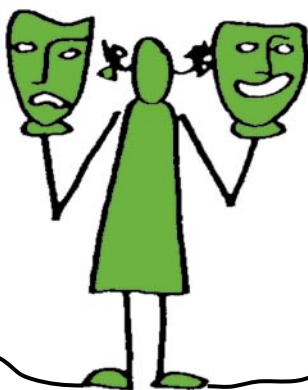
My plans? Carrying on walking holding hands with the Third Sector, expand my vision and knowledge. I also have plans to go to university, plans for my relationship, travelling... but always carrying with me the movement for which I will always be grateful, the Social Movement.



*Christmas with friends in 2005 in Laranjeiras*

# Militancy: the Liberation of Inertia

Dayane Conceição



## Dayane Conceição,

16 years old, born in the city of Rio de Janeiro and raised in the district of Bangu, in the community of Vila Aliança, where she lives today.

She is in her last year of secondary school in the Bangu State School.

At the end of 2000, she joined the group Caixa de Supresa [Box of Surprises], taking part in citizenship workshops that are integrated with dance and theatre.

Around 2002, she began working around citizenship issues with her colleagues from the school Ollof Palme.

In 2003 she began voluntary work in theatre with Project Seeds of Tomorrow and in 2004, she entered the project Talent of the Moment, which started the Applause Company.

Still in 2004, she took on a role as coordinator of the State-wide Forum of Black Young Women, participating in a number of panels, debates and marches together with the Black Movement, Feminist Movement and the Grupo Arco-Íris.

In 2005, she entered the project Youth for Gender Equality as a change-worker, acting as a facilitator and capacity builder with groups of young people from the communities of Nova and Vila Aliança.

All of these ways of participating are still present in Dayane's life.

She believes in militancy as a mission, a liberation from the inertia of the day to day, as a great opportunity that was given to her, capable of transforming her life as a person, as a youth, and especially as a citizen of a community, of a society.



**M**<sup>erits</sup>

*Somebody does not exert himself, but achieves everything he wants  
You who struggles do not manage  
Somebody fulfils a dream  
And you think that only your dreams are not fulfilled  
Somebody says that you are a failure  
And you are persuaded and give up the fight  
The days go by...  
And you convince yourself that nothing is worth fighting for  
Somebody says that a sword in a coward's hand is useless  
And you begin to regain your strength  
Somebody says that merits are given to the worthy  
You ask if your struggle was not enough  
Somebody says that victory is only worth it if you fight for it  
And you begin to believe in yourself  
Somebody says once again that you are a failure  
And you keep on fighting  
Somebody says that you were strong and that maybe this was the only time that you  
really fought  
And you come to the conclusion that victory is not difficult, it is challenging and that  
is why you need to fight  
Somebody says that the biggest winner is who wins by merit, or else he is deceived  
After fighting for so long you manage the long awaited victory through merit  
The years go by...  
And you have become a great winner and have learnt that losing is part of victory  
and that barriers will always exist, but despite this you need to carry on.*

*Dayane Conceição*



My name is Dayane, I am 16 years old and was born in the maternity of Santa Helena, on the twelfth day of the month of February 1990. I was only registered on the 12th of April 1996, because when I was born my dad did not want to register me and my mum, hoping he would change his mind, decided to wait. It was no use. I am proudly registered only in my mum's name.

My dad was never present in my life and each day I reconfirm this absence. Maybe it is better this way. Maybe he has nothing good to tell me, or maybe is scared about what he may hear. The truth is that in these sixteen years, I have nothing good or bad to tell him. The only thing I can say is that he has made himself indifferent in my life.

My mum, on the other hand, always gave all the support that she could, working day until night as a domestic servant. It was like this that she raised her five children, with a lot of sacrifice, but with much dignity.

My mum had almost no time to stay home, but I knew it had to be this way. She needed to work to support her children alone and keep her home without the help of a father. She was everything!

Despite this I had a good childhood! I loved playing with dolls, tag, hide-and-seek, hop-scotch, dodge-ball, doll's house, that is, all the typical childhood games.

I miss my childhood, my first bicycle, my tricycle, my dolls, the games. I miss being a child!

Time went by, but I did not manage to wipe the memories and the longing for my childhood. Quite the opposite, the more time goes by, the more I remember, and the more I remember the more I miss this time.

I had a happy childhood. Happy just for being able to be a child, to be able to play, to be afraid of the bogeyman. Today children are afraid of gunshots, of dying or of losing someone who they care for a lot. Today it is complicated to speak about childhood. Children have lost the essence of being a child.

Where are the children's songs and dances? What did they do with the games of tag? Where are the stories? No one knows how to tell them? I have many questions. I do not know any longer if the child knows how to be a child or if she can any longer be one.

It is hypocritical to carry on saying that they are the hope of our country. No one can give that which they have lost.

Some things I think that we have lost for good, without any chance of

getting it back. Seeing children once again being children is one of these.

Living in a favela is not easy, but that is where I live. I know that this labels me, imposes limits. Limits which I do not want and will not respect!

I need to resist the prejudices, the neglect and the violence if I want to reach my goals. But I also know that, as a militant, I will resist.

I am aware that my life today could have followed a completely different path. I could have been one more mirror image of my day to day, of the reality in which I live, or be just another person in the world. However, I know that I am someone. Someone who knows perfectly well what she wants from life and who believes that you can fulfil your dream when you really fight for it.

It is easy to say that we are marginals when the newspapers only publish the deaths and tragedies that happen in the favela. They forget that there you also have culture. There are those who say that you only have bandits there, that they become thieves through life circumstances.

These people have no support, no opportunity, and still manage to live with dignity!

I want to change the story of these people, of people like me, like us, who struggle and believe in what they do. My resistance has allowed me today to tell my story, to show what you can do when you have the basics!

I know that many friends already cannot do anything, they are lost in life or have lost their lives.

I started my militancy in the group Caixa de Surpresa, where I started through being invited by a friend. The group worked with dance and theatre as forms of communication. The sketches we did were based on themes discussed in citizenship classes, taken from our day to day, from our reality.

The citizenship classes enriched my knowledge, allowed me to be a competent speaker and strengthened my objectives.

But I did not stop there. Caixa de Surpresa established a partnership with the NGO Center for the Documentation and Information, Women's Thing, through which I was called to



*Performance by Caixa de Surpresa in the Seminar  
"Gender and Ethnicity" 2006*



coordinate the State-wide Forum of Black Young Women. In total we were seven youths. We promoted meetings and debates with other young people from different communities. We also produced a newsletter that we distributed during the meetings.

Through Caixa de Surpresa I also participated in the project Talent of the Moment. In the first stage of this project we had classes on citizenship, human rights and art history. In the second stage we had to choose one of the six options: dance, theatre, music, art or circus.

Each one would work within the chosen area, so that in the end all of these would be put together in a single show. This show was “Pare, só é nosso”, about the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil and their discovery of the Indians who were the owners of this land. Soon after, we did our second show called “Morro de Amores”, about the port region of Rio de Janeiro.

As the project was run by the city council and had as a goal to work with a number of youngsters from different communities, as we participated in before we could not do so again. But as we had become a family and seeing that art was flowing in our blood we believed that this would not be the end of the story. So, Mrs Ivonete, coordinator of the project, came up with the idea of the “Applause Company”, which counted with the participation of wonderful professionals from the arts supervised by Cininha de Paula.

Through the Company I obtained my provisional actors registration card. The Company’s first show was called “5 x Rodrigues e Rodrigues”: five plays by Nelson Rodrigues with songs by Lupicínio Rodrigues. The script was adapted by the assistant director and theatre teacher Claudia Ricart.

I am really in love with art. I believe in art as a form of communication, I believe in the expression of my body, my face, my eyes!

Art manages to add up all these things into one, it is a passion that I have and which I will carry for the rest of my life.

Yes I live in a *favela* but I do not think this is a problem, despite knowing that people label me because of this. There are people who think that those born there should die there. People feel entitled to trace our destinies!

I do not want to be pitied I only want those in government to look to the communities and give these people an opportunity!

Everything in life is a challenge, things are not given as gifts, they are earned with merit. I will defend what I believe in until the end, because I know that somewhere in the world there is someone who believes in me.

Wherever I get to, I cannot forget my roots, the people who have



helped me, the place where I come from and the things I have faced to get where I am. I never want to think that I know it all, as I always have things to learn. I want to make each instant of my journey worthwhile.

## THOUGHTS:

Do not throw words to the wind,  
Because in some moment you will miss them.  
Remember: I do not want to play the victim to get what I want, I am not  
and do not want to be pitied, I certainly do not need that.  
I believe in the family, in friends...  
They give me strength when all seems lost.  
I have never needed to be like anyone, but I needed to believe in someone,  
especially in God. I always believe in Him, in all moments of my life.  
I need and have much faith in God!

## Personal expectations

I want to be able to give a better life to my great mum, who supports me in everything I do. My mum is everything for me, she is my dad and my mum. After all, she is who gave me life and taught me how to live!

I want to go to university, do a masters course and eventually do a doctorate in the profession I choose.

I never thought that militancy would have such positive repercussions in my life and I thank God it has. I know that I am part of a minority of young people who gets to be sixteen. I want to and will manage to take this opportunity to other communities, because I believe in myself and in what I have been taught.

## GREAT FATHERLAND GENTLE MOTHER<sup>18</sup>

*You have abandoned your neediest children  
They suffer and need you  
And you forget them and reject them  
Even though you are gentle you have forgotten to be mother, to be fatherland  
And if you are so great why not take care of your children?*



*Great fatherland gentle mother  
Who only loves her yellow children  
From the green ones you take away their hope  
And the blue of the sky only shines on those who enrich you  
And I am here in the black of the order, fighting for a great PROGRESS!*

*Dayane Conceição*

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<sup>18</sup>The title of the poem is taken from a verse of the Brazilian national anthem. The allusions towards the end are to the Brazilian flag in the center of which is a banner with the words “Order and Progress”.

# Behind the Scenes

*"The act of writing is generally not very difficult for me, as it is already a part of my life, at the end of the day I have chosen a profession that deals with this most of the time. However, when I saw myself in front of the task of writing a text for this publication, I discovered that it is a lot easier to talk – or rather, write – about others than about oneself."*

*Before being invited to participate in this project, I had never had time to think about this thing called Participation. Deep down I knew that my work brought something good for me and for others, but I had not perceived its real function. It was through the conversations with other participants and the writing of my own trajectory that I could reflect about what I do, of the importance that this has for me, and the repercussions of this in the place where I live."*

*After a long period without having a clue what to write, and after many rough drafts thrown in the bin, I got to the final text with some questions and answers that had never occurred to me before. In truth, this text is not finished, and I don't even know if it will be one day, because many of the questions that emerged during this process still have no answer."*

*But I arrive here with the certainty that the experience I had was worth it. It was really good to stop for a moment from the rush of daily work and look at what I have been doing. And I liked what I saw. As for the answers, I am still looking for them."* (Manuelle)





*“The process of writing was really important, because it made me remember wonderful moments of my life. Each paragraph, each phrase, was a moment of my life that went on the page, bringing me memories. Writing this book, I laughed and I cried, I woke in me all the feelings that are capable of carrying memories. And it was important to re-live even those that made me cry. Even being just a memory, just a moment, that moment, my moment, I lived it. And even though all this has become the past in my life, it was important that I remembered, so that I could know how much I have lived and all that I have gone through.*

*It was wonderful this work with all this group, discussing our ideas every meeting so that today we could show you, readers, the result of our work: ‘our book’, this book” (Dayana)*

*“How was it writing this text? For me it was wonderful, remember experiences, stories, old visions of the future... during this time I realised that things really change, people grow and time does not stop. I always thought that I was already too smart, too experienced... Won, how I was wrong!*

*Opening the dusty boxes of my past searching for old notebooks and diaries, to copy texts and remember facts... it was a therapeutic experience. I have always written my ideas and opinions. I have also gone through phases of leaving all this to the side, but I always go back to it. I had never written anything with the goal of publishing it.*

*When Udi phoned me up and we talked about the project, I have to be honest, as he talked full of energy about the book, I thought: ‘what will I write? My life must be nothing great compared to others... It will be horrible!’ Well, horrible I know that it is not, and I have also stopped with this stupid ‘neurosis’ of thinking about what other people will think about all this. For me this story is already a success, a personal victory!*

*To grow is wonderful! And to remember this has been really good for me. It was like recharging the batteries to go on, with the same intensity as in the beginning, and with the same hope for the end. My hope now is only around the understanding of the people who will have this text in their hands. I hope that they can make some use of all this without judging what would be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. We are here to help!” (Leandro)*

*“Writing about my story made me reflect about how difficult it is to define oneself to oneself. I also discovered that I know more about what I really want than I had imagined. This text reminded me of all this life journey which is not over yet, it made me think of how much I can still live.*

*The ‘look inside’ is a difficult exercise, painful and wonderful. Writing my thoughts, sharing these with the group and on top of that publishing them, makes me very happy. Something like this must be celebrated, remembered. I feel different, for I never imagined that one day the simple things would be valued. I realised that participating in social projects is an act of surrender and giving that takes me far and at the same time very close to reality. I felt all the emotions again as I relived the events that I was retelling. It was, and will be beautiful, because books are eternal, lives that never finish.” (Gabriela)*



*“Speaking about ourselves is very difficult, easy is to speak of other people. Remembering childhood is even more difficult. It is like doing a ‘consciousness exam’: there is a need of absolute silence. Or of music in the background, for those who really like it. But there can’t be anyone to disturb. One needs an ideal place to do this. Maybe a garden, with many birds, a little grass to lie on, a tree on which we can lean on. But anyway... my ‘process of writing’ is all wrong! Today is the 26th of November 2006, I am travelling tomorrow, Monday, only coming back Thursday afternoon, the day the group is meeting. I am not under a tree, there are too many people here at home making too much noise. Well, up to now I am managing something, I hope it continues to the end. End!!!” (Eron)*



*“There is no participation without dialogue! The process of creating this book was a constant dialogue amongst the very rich experiences of participation of seven young people who are engaged in different spaces. Seeing this publication I feel satisfied and unsettled. Satisfied by the result, after many months of collective elaboration and construction, marked by pleasurable moments and (why not?) some controversies.*

*This process was not for us without anguish. Each one brought their own weaknesses, uncertainties and fears about the path that each has traced for him(her)self.*

*I feel unsettled because after each meeting and each re-reading of the life trajectories, new provocations came up, making me question my professional and personal practices. As the poet said, ‘life is the art of encounter’, and it was precisely in meeting people so sensitive to injustice that something in me changed. I believe that the seven young people did not want to be seen as examples to be followed, but as ‘provokers’ who may unsettle, raised doubts about our convictions, but who, above all, bring us the certainty that we are not alone in our struggle.” (Marcelo)*



*“This experience was not only enriching for the young people, but also to the whole CIESPI team that worked on this project, and especially for me. At each meeting, even without the presence of everyone, I was affected by this group, which at each moment showed us how much it is valuable to participate, even if very difficult and painful at the same time. How I re-thought of my own actions!!*

*At the beginning of this research I only had a vague idea of what this concept meant: PARTICIPATION. However, after the process of constructing the book and the research, my perspective shifted. At every moment new elements made me believe that everyone participates,*

*though in different ways and that we only learn to participate, participating. However, I believe that participation is a conquest that is processual, interminable, constant. There does not exist a participation that is finished, ready. And when you imagine or consider participation as sufficient, it regresses or becomes rigid.*

*I learnt with the group to value even more the simple actions, because they make up the Participation. I also learnt how important it is to build other spaces in which everyone can feel comfortable to dialogue, interact and well, participate.” (Roberta)*

*“The idea behind this book was to develop a process of collective and individual reflection about what is participation for young people. The texts presented here go way beyond my initial expectations, showing in a very vivid way how life and participation in initiatives focussing on social transformation weave together in the trajectories of these young people. I learnt a great deal from these weaves and with the tapestry that they make up together. They made me reflect about how I participate in the struggles for social transformation and of how I could participate more. We tried in the process of creating this book to practice participation the most we could. And, though we met many challenges along the way, I believe that you only learn to participate participating. In this way we launch this book into the world. It now has its own legs and can walk. Who knows what surprises its walk will bring? I hope that other groups of young people also manage to conquer new spaces to express what they feel is important and to reflect on how they want to change the world. So that another world be not only possible, but reachable.” Udi)*

